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ABSTRACT

This study examined current information retrieval strategies used by online searchers involved in psychological research. A survey was distributed in fall 1988 to 200 database coordinators at institutions of higher education throughout the United States to obtain information on the databases accessed and use of multi-database options. The response rate was 65%. In addition to PsychINFO, the most frequently accessed databases were ERIC, MEDLINE, SOCIAL SCISEARCH, SOCIOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS, and DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS. Few respondents indicated they used multi-database files such as DIALINDEX and CROS. (8 references) (MES)

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Online Database Use in Psychology: A Survey of Academic Libraries

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RUNNING HEAD: Online Database Use

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Online Database Use in Psychology: A Survey of Academic Libraries

PsycINFO (the online version of Psychological Abstracts) is usually the database of choice when researchers are in need of literature or information on topics in the behavioral sciences, particularly the field of psychology.^{1,2,3} More recently, however, studies have stressed the utility of multiple file searches so as to obtain comprehensive coverage of the psychological literature.^{4,5,6} Unfortunately, few studies have investigated the use of multiple files by searchers in the behavioral sciences.

In order to analyze current retrieval strategies used by online database searchers involved in psychological research, the authors distributed a national survey to database coordinators throughout the United States in the Fall of 1988. The sample included an average of four institutions of higher education in each state as well as the District of Columbia. The 130 responses received out of 200 survey questionnaires reflect a response rate of 65%. This representative sample should be helpful in obtaining insights into database searching strategies related to psychologically-oriented topics. It should be noted that one question from the survey and several responses concerning PsycALERT have been omitted because of the demise of that database.

THE SURVEY FORM

In order to determine database selection in psychology research, the questionnaire focused on the following questions:

1. When performing online searches on psychological topics do you restrict your search to PsycINFO?

_____YES

_____NO

If NO - Please list the additional databases that you normally access in addition to PsycINFO...

- | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ | 3. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 5. _____ | 6. _____ |

2. Do you utilize multi-database options such as DIALINDEX "PSYCH" category which is available through the DIALOG service?

_____YES - If YES - how often...

_____0-24%

_____25-49%

_____NO

_____50-75%

_____>75%

SURVEY RESULTS

Although 130 survey forms were returned, several questions were unanswered by some respondents. Thus, the usable responses will be reported in percentages.

Interestingly, 90% of the respondents to question one indicated that they did not restrict their online searches to PsycINFO when performing searches on psychological topics. The second part of this question sought to identify the most frequently accessed databases used in conjunction with PsycINFO. The following table indicates the six most frequently identified databases and the percentage of respondents listing each database.

Table 1DATABASES ACCESSED WITH PsycINFO

<u>DATABASE</u>	<u>% of RESPONDENTS</u>
ERIC	65%
MEDLINE	40%
SOCIAL SCISEARCH	38%
SOCIOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS	26%
DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS	18%

The high ranking of ERIC and MEDLINE may be explained in part because of their low cost in accessing citations in the behavioral sciences. SOCIAL SCISEARCH ranked third and was also a surprise because of its high cost; however, it is an excellent behavioral sciences database and is listed in DIALOG'S DIALINDEX "PSYCH" category and BRS's "SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES" category in the CROS database. SOCIOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS was also identified as an important behavioral sciences database by its number 4 ranking - possibly influenced in part by its moderate cost and DIALINDEX and CROS database listings. DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS, which ranked fifth, is a database that is virtually mandatory for all graduate students preparing a thesis or dissertation - a factor which undoubtedly influenced its popularity. Although dissertations are selectively included in PsycINFO, researchers may want to access DISSERTATIONS ABSTRACTS for comprehensive dissertation retrieval.

Question 2 sought to identify how frequently online searchers use multi-database files such as DIALINDEX or CROS. The results indicated that few respondents used such options. The frequency of the

reported usage of these files is indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

USE OF MULTI-DATABASE SEARCH OPTIONS

<u>FREQUENCY RANGE</u>	<u>% of RESPONDENTS</u>
0 - 24%	88%
25 - 49%	5%
50 - 75%	2%
> 75%	5%

These data indicate that only 12% of the respondents utilize such multi-database search strategies at least 24% of the time. A clear majority of searchers do not consider this search option for psychological topics despite the availability of behavioral science databases in multiple file options.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this survey suggest that alternate search strategies are in fact implemented in practice by online searchers. The use of ERIC, MEDLINE, and SOCIAL SCISEARCH in conjunction with PsycINFO is quite popular. The use of databases other than PsycINFO may be a reflection of the attempt by searchers to retrieve literature in fields outside the mainstream of psychology. In fact, alternative database strategies have been shown to be highly effective in retrieval performance in fields other than psychology.^{7,8}

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